Nuggets of News

GOLD HILL HISTORICAL SOCIETY
gold discovered 1860
recording the past for the future
1986

P.O. Box 26
Gold Hill, Ore. 97525
504 First Avenue
(503) 855-1182

September, 1994

Secretary, Ted Wharton, cooks up a storm!

POTLUCK

Our annual potluck was held Sunday, August 21st and was well attended. We were all so busy having fun that we forgot to count, but consensus places attendance at a minimum of 50. The food was delicious with abundant variety. Ted Wharton did a superior job of cooking chicken and corn on the cob at our new outdoor firepit in the side yard. He also furnished all of the chicken and corn. Many thanks, Ted, for a great job. We had a wonderful afternoon of visiting and Bingo, and are looking forward to next year's potluck. Many thanks, too, to Alyce Bottelson for calling the Bingo for us.

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MUSEUM HOURS

With summer behind us, our museum hours have changed in accordance with the agreement reached at the July 20th meeting. Our museum hours are 10:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M.

Fall (Labor Day thru Thanksgiving) Thursday thru Sunday

Winter (Thanksgiving thru Memorial Day) Friday thru Sunday

Summer (Memorial Day thru Labor Day) Wednesday thru Sunday.

We do need volunteers to help staff the museum. If you have even a couple hours to help us, or to fill in when one of our "regulars" can't make it, please let us know. Also, we'll soon be putting together work parties to get caught up on cataloging, photographing and sorting many of our artifacts, as well as labeling and changing the present displays. Please be a part of your society -- let us know what your interests are and how you are willing to help us continue to grow.

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CUSHMAN'S HOME

After a year of teaching in England, the Tom Cushman family arrived home last month. We will sorely miss his "letters from England" in the newsletters, but are so happy to have them back. Tom has always been an advocate of our society so we're once more looking forward to his participation.

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ANNUAL REPORT

Our fiscal year, 07/01/93 thru 06/30/94, has come to a close with a year of great accomplishment behind us. During the previous fiscal year ('92/'93) we realized our goal of finding and purchasing our permanent home, but '93/'94 meant getting the house ready to move into. It seemed to take forever, but when we look back at how much we accomplished in just one short year,

we're amazed. We took possession of the house on 08/04/93. Our maintenance budget was then really blown for the year, but funds were freed up from display, photographic and conservation budgets since the museum was closed and all work was concentrated on "getting the museum open again". Our grand opening was held January 8, 1994 and it is wonderful to share our history with the public once again. We were careful to control our spending, even for items approved in the budget, since we had no history to let us know what expenses would be in our new home, and basic maintenance had to take precedence. We finished the fiscal year with $7,000 left which will now allow us to purchase the items previously budgeted. Our security system was installed and put into operation by Sonitrol in August, and the dark room is now installed and operational. We are currently getting bids on other items, including a computer, TV/VCR for educational tapes, cash register for gift shop, file cabinets, etc. The current year's budget has been approved to build our disabled access in the rear and our parking lot. We hope also to be able to get inside stairs to the basement and disabled access to the bathroom, so this fiscal year looks like another busy one.

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EARLY MEMORIES IN GOLD HILL

by Charles Benjamin Wharton
December, 1993

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Continued from June, 1994 Nuggets of News

CHAPTER 3. DUST and STEEL BALLS (continued)

I was allowed to tag along on hunting expeditions with the big kids after I passed a series of tests, including tying my shoes in the dark. I don't recall that any serious game was bagged, but a lot of tin cans got plinked.

In the summer of 1931 it was decided by our gang that hand-held sling shots didn't have enough range, so the secret Big Slingshot was born. We volunteered to clean up Charley Kell's repair garage in exchange for two used red rubber inner tubes, the stretchy kind. On the hill above the chicken and bee yard was a madrone sapling with a perfect fork about four feet above the ground. Inch-wide strips cut from an inner tube, about six feet long, were easy to tie to the fork with sash cord salvaged from the burned-out Feeny house. The top from an old leather boot made a perfect projectile pouch for our deadly weapon. And it pointed right over the bee yard and garden toward the tin roof of old man Alvie Cook's mink house. We didn't care much for him, because he was always yelling at kids, and because he had cheated Dad out of some money by not paying for a carpentry job. We reckoned he was about as mean as his minks, and we needed to get even with him. We worried about the bees a little. What if a stray pellet banged into a hive and they came swarming after us? It was finally agreed that we would be far enough away that they wouldn't connect the assault with us. Still, we talked about being careful.

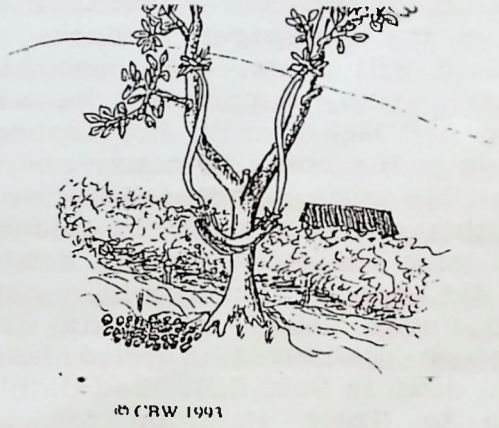
The mink shed was close to a hundred yards away, but we thought we might be able to hit it, even though there was an intervening screen of manzanita bushes that masked out all but a red strip along the ridge at the feeding end.

We tried a few shots, but they fell somewhere between the peach tree and the kale patch in the garden, far short. We stretched back farther on the rubbers. Suddenly one of them broke, and Ted sat down hard in the rocks. He made light of it by laughing, be we noticed him rubbing his behind when he thought no one was watching. We observed that where the scissors cuts had made nicks there were small cracks already forming. So we improved the cutting process, and the next set of rubbers lasted a long time. We also raised the tie points up a few inches.

The range increased, but then we couldn't see where the pellets were landing, even when Don Dungey hid in the scrub oak thicket to spot where they dropped. We thought about using the bugle for a signal. We had found that a bugle blown from the front porch produced a 6-second echo from Echo Mountain across the river, and neighbors were

accustomed to hearing it being blown. But then we began to learn how to spot the shots, so the bugle was never employed. After a few days the kale and rhubarb leaves were getting pretty well shredded, so we knew the direction was correct.

One Sunday morning, while Cooks were at church, we finally connected. There was a resounding bang like an explosion, followed by squealing and turmoil that could be heard all the way to our artillery post. We cheered silently. The next week we managed two more hits, the second one with a slug bigger than a walnut. This created such a disturbance that old Cook came running out yelling, and scoured all the brush patches up and down the road, looking for whoever was throwing rocks at his shed. Even though we were far away, we got a little scared, and decided our prank had gone far enough. We got even more scared when Don's big brother Vern pointed out that those steel slugs could break windows, or even kill someone walking along the road. So we stopped shooting at the mink house, and decided to save the slingshot for winter to throw snowballs.



©CRW 1993

But then the Cameron kids discovered it, and began lobbing dirt clods at us in our dugout fort across the gulch. So we scrapped the whole apparatus, except one rubber strap was left flapping in the wind. The other inner tube provided ammunition for our rubber band pistols for a year. We had enough that Ted even invented a machine gun that shot off one rubber after another as a crank was turned.

That madrone is now a large tree, with twin trunks covered with smooth, leathery red bark, interrupted by patches of peeling flecks looking like the aftermath of a bad sunburn. It produces fragrant white blossoms in spring, and pulpy orange berries, prized by robins and cedar waxwings in the fall. The left trunk has a strange deformity ten feet above the ground.

CHAPTER 4. GOLD HILL BRANCH, HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY

The Hudson's Bay Company was a major contributor to settling Oregon. Without the lucrative fur trade, the early westward movement would have been much less intense, and the Oregon Country might have lain fallow for another fifty years. It might even have become Russian. Trappers returning east laden with fortunes in pelts provided as strong a magnet drawing people to Oregon as the promise of fertile land and new opportunities. The Company still has a store in Portland, but now they deal in outing equipment not intended for the purpose of taking pelts.

Over the years Dad had related spellbinding stories about running a trapline during his younger years near Glendale. He and his partner Huey had ridden their horses in 1912 all the way from Portland to Southern Oregon, well over 200 miles, seeking adventure. Huey was a reformed drug addict who had been counselled to get out of the city and seek a clean life. Dad had recently had a narrow escape when he overslept and missed the sailing of his ship the S. S. BEAR, on which he was the newly commissioned wireless telegraph operator. An old salt sitting on top of a piling had gotten so excited when he saw the rats leaving the ship that he nearly fell into the harbor. And Dad had been so upset that he turned and tossed all night. When he finally did fall asleep, he didn't wake up until 9:00 o'clock, two hours after the ship weighed anchor.

The S. S. BEAR left Portland without wireless, bound for San Francisco, but only got as far as Port Orford, Oregon, where she went on the rocks in a fog. That was an unnerving experience, bringing up feelings all the way from guilt to profound thankfulness that the old sailor had seen the rats leaving.

By working as a photographer's

assistant and in the kitchen of a Kosher restaurant while he attended Wireless School, Dad had put aside quite a bit of money. Huey had some money from an inheritance, what was left after his binge on high living and drugs. Both men wanted to get away for a while. They equipped themselves with horses and trappings, kit bags of provisions and gear, and set out for the wilds of Southern Oregon in June. After many long days and nights on the trail, they stopped at a hotel in Azalea, and washed off the trail grime.

Next day they rode on a little past Glendale, made their last camp, and sidled up to the bar in the Wolf Creek Tavern. There they met a Nez Perce Indian named Gans Campion, who, for the price of a few beers, filled their ears with stories of a lost mine up Cow Creek. He didn't make it clear what it was the mine had produced, and he couldn't remember exactly where it was. He introduced them to a leathery backwoodsman named Rondeau, whose mother was Nez Perce, and whose father had been a passing French trapper. For a bottle of whiskey, Rondeau led them to an abandoned log cabin on the side of Green Mountain, up near Goolaway Gap, and induced them to fix it up and move in, while they looked for the mine. He took a liking to the young men, especially after Dad surprised him with his handling of the Smith and Wesson six-shooter he had bought in Montana. Rondeau offered to teach them to hunt---with rifles he sold them for a good price---and to help them make the transition from city men to mountain men. It took a while to get the hang of hitting a moving target with a 30-30. He also sold them traps, and helped lay out trap lines.

On one trip they found a baby bobcat and raised it for a pet. They tried to befriend a cub bear, but it had other ideas, and removed the front of Dad's mackinaw with one well-aimed swipe of its paw. Huey drove it off with his rifle butt, just before the sow arrived. That event developed respect for bears.

They managed to get beavers, raccoons, skunks, weasels, coyotes, snowshoe hares, and a fox or two, and sold the pelts to pay for supplies and more traps. But they didn't get rich, and in fact would have starved if they hadn't bagged deer regularly, and even a couple of bears toward the end of winter, all out of season.

Gamewarden Riley Hammersley came knocking at the door once during a snowstorm and asked for shelter. He tied his big black government horse next to their cowponies in the shed, and shouldered his bedroll into the cabin to enjoy the warmth and their venison stew. He never once looked up at the rows of venison jerky strips and the bear hams hanging in the rafter to cure. Next morning he thanked them, gave them a handful of 30-30 cartridges, scratched Old Tom, the bobcat, under the chin, and rode off. He was interested in poachers from the city, not mountain men trying to survive. He and Dad remained friends for many years.

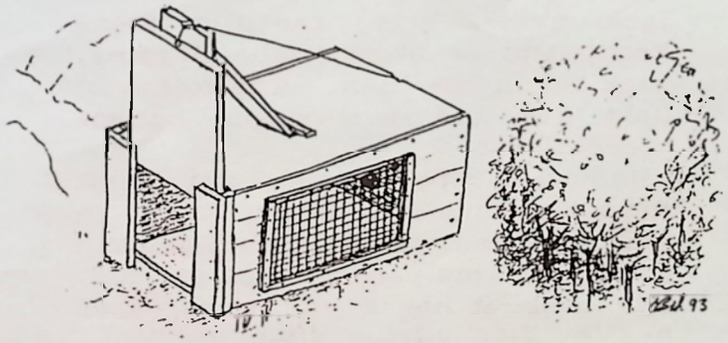
Neither of the adventurers ever returned to Portland as planned. Huey died while attempting to find a lost mine, and Dad got lost in a fog, and wandered into Evans Valley where he was rescued by an old retired sailor named Luie Sivers. He helped Luie with his farm until the old man died, then moved into town to take up the newspaper business at the Gold Hill News. He met Ida Starnes, who supported herself during her last year in high school working in the boarding house where he took his meals. They fell in love, and although her parents objected to an 18 year old girl marrying a 27-year old man of the world, they eloped over the mountains to Hornbrook, California, married, and settled down in Gold Hill. Dad didn't return to Green Mountain for 40 years, finally with Ted. They were never able to find the old cabin.

We didn't live in 1913 on Green Mountain, but 1931 in Duel Gulch, above Gold Hill. But Ted was fascinated with Dad's stories, and thought we ought to have a trap line, and sell the pelts along with the family's rabbit skins. A prime skunk hide, with a narrow stripe, could bring as much as 50 cents. We already had a little experience with traps from the previous spring. The quail were destroying our strawberries, so Mother had the idea

to set a trap for them. She had in mind a boxtrap, but there was a steel trap hanging in the woodshed, so we set it in the patch, with a juicy red strawberry for bait on the trigger. The flopping of the big male bird that got caught by the neck scared off the rest of the quail, and they didn't bother for a long time. One quail doesn't have much meat on it, but we shared it with pleasure.

In the Boy Scout Handbook was the picture of a box trap that looked easy to make, so we went into the woodshed to fabricate one out of an old pear box. It looked pretty good when it was finished, and we tested it with the cat. He was able to push the door right open, and ran for cover before we could catch him for further tests. What the picture didn't show was that the door has to slide in grooves that hold it from being pushed open. We figured that out ourselves, and later had it verified by Uncle Jess Starnes, who was a great outdoorsman.

He had stopped by on his new Indian motorcycle after a trip over the Siskiyous with his side-kick Eddie Neathammer. He was very pleased with his riding skill, and claimed he had come all the way from Dollarheid to Ashland without touching the handlebars, just steering by shifting his weight. We believed him of course. He was a daredevil guy, and was able to buy the motorcycle because he made extra money taking hazardous jobs in the sawmill in Grants Pass. Uncle Jess helped us make an improved model, with a screen window that let you look in to see what had been caught.



BOXTRAP, MODEL II

We now had two box traps, and three No. 6 steel traps from the woodshed. That didn't seem like the complete inventory needed for an extensive trapline, but we could buy more as the profits began rolling in. Bait presented a problem. Dad had said that the human scent on a trap will scare away such animals as foxes and coyotes, but raccoons, skunks and weasels are less skittish. The accepted method, according to his experience, was to wear gloves that have been held over flames, boil the traps, and never touch them with bare hands. Finally, you pour melted bacon fat around to hide the residual footprint odors. Either our preparations were inadequate, or there were no foxes in Duel Gulch, because we never caught any. We knew there were coyotes, because of the midnight raid on our rabbit house the year before, in which 6 rabbits died, apparently from fright. But we never caught any coyotes either. Skunks and raccoons were another story.

Furs will not sell unless they are in prime condition, which means they must be taken during winter or spring, when the hairs are thick and held fast. A pelt taken in summer sheds continuously, and would be worthless in a lady's stole.

That meant getting up early on winter mornings, before the frozen ground thawed into sticky mud, to tend the trapline. The first couple of days we got nothing. Then one blustery, dark morning the second boxtrap was sprung, and it was obvious from the odor, even while we were still quite a ways off, that there was a skunk inside, and very much alive and mad. We hadn't really thought out very well how to dispatch the critter without wrecking the trap or getting ourselves sprayed. A gun would have been a big help, but we didn't have one along. Sharp sticks would punch holes in the hide and decrease its value. Eventually we managed to get the door open, and bashed him in the head as he lumbered off toward tall timber.

Now we had our first trophy, but the trap was so thoroughly sprayed we couldn't stand to get close to it. The carcass itself surprisingly didn't smell too bad, and we were able to skin it out, cut out the belly fat to make skunk oil for leather waterproofing, and bury the remains

without great difficulty. We thought the trap was ruined, but it continued to catch skunks, which we handled in the same manner as the first one. We had to keep a special set of clothes, hanging out by the chicken house, to use on the trapline. Mother's tolerance extended only so far, not including skunky clothes in the house. Ted had to be decontaminated thoroughly on school days before he went.

Raccoons are big and can be mean. We wondered how to handle one, but none ever got caught in the boxtraps. Bait was missing and traps were sprung several times, and we concluded that the 'coon's tail probably held the door up and it was able to back out and escape. We finally did get 'coons in the steel trap down by the spring, and were able to subdue them with the steel rod that was used for harvesting the rabbits. Raccoon meat was excellent. After we caught our first one, on a crisp, sunny Saturday morning, we built a manzanita fire near the spring and roasted the hind quarters in celebration. It was a little oilier than rabbit, but had good flavor. We really felt like mountain men living off the land, huddled around our fire, turning the skewered thighs over the glowing coals, as a passing cloud filtered snowflakes down through the pine branches. The town seemed a long way off at that moment. In the early morning light the gray rocky ridge could have been Goolaway Gap. We tried unsuccessfully for weasels and bobcats, using everything we could think of for bait. Sometimes the bait was stolen, sometimes the traps were sprung, but nothing was in them. Once we had a clue, when there were bluejay feathers around the trap. It wasn't clear just what had happened to the jay; had he gotten caught in the trap and then been eaten by something else, or had he just had a narrow escape? We never knew.

As the weather warmed up and the trapping season drew to a close, we decided to try one last time for weasels or bobcats. We had caught a fish, and the head and tail were left over after dinner. We had never used fish for bait before, and we departed the baited trapline with great expectations. Early next morning we clambered up the mountain along paths that were getting so used we had no trouble following them even in dim light. No weasels in the boxtraps, or in the first two traps. But from a clump of chaparral hiding the third trap came a mournful wail. We looked at each other in wonder. Was it the spirits of all the animals we had trapped? Was it a lost child? We hurried cautiously to the spot, and saw a yellow form hunched over. The neighbor's tomcat had only a swollen paw when we released it.

CHAPTER 5. GOLD

Back in Chapter One I promised to talk about gold. The gold fever was highly contagious in the days when we were growing up, and we caught the infection badly. But to set the stage properly for that episode, we need to go back to some early history.

Ted's former sixth grade teacher at Gold Hill School, and later a Scouting executive, Marjory Skeeters Peña, related to me in about 1980, the following:

"The first Oregon gold was discovered in Harney Basin by Stephen Meek in 1846, two years before the renowned find at Sutter's Mill in California. Meeks little mine grew into the famous Blue Bucket Mine, which dominated the Eastern Oregon scene almost to the extent the Sutter's Mill find dominated the Central California scene, although at a much smaller magnitude."

"The fever spread to Southern Oregon from both north and south, with major finds at Gold Hill, at Jacksonville, along the Old Stage Road, and at Sterlingville Diggins, back up in the hills. The towns of Gold Hill and Jacksonville became boomtowns."

We have a copy, obtained from Aunt Ruth Harmon, of a letter written in 1855 by great-great uncle Benjamin F. Miller to his parents back in Ohio, telling about his trials and fortunes at the Sterlingville Diggins, O.T. (Oregon didn't become a state until 1858). The amount of material moved by hand was astonishing. The work was done mainly by Chinese immigrants fleeing starvation back

home, who were accustomed to back-breaking manual labor and primitive living conditions. Horses, and even donkeys could not be used down in the narrow creekbed to handle dirt and rocks. Ben Miller married Margaret, the daughter of Capt. John Sutton, and their daughter, Mary Eva, was the first white child born in the Table Rock region, in 1858.

Marjory's story continues: "My maternal grandfather, Joseph Rittner Scranton, worked at T. Chavner's (she pronounced it like Cavenaugh) after the Modoc Indian War. While he was digging post holes, he discovered a gold pocket on the slope between hills that are now named Blackwell Hill and Gold Hill. He took a sample of the gold to Dardanelles, but was not allowed to file a claim, because Mr. Chavner said the find was on his property. He took the gold, without compensation, other than the usual wages." During the mining boom around Gold Hill, a total of $600,000 to $800,000 worth of gold was eventually extracted from the mother lode, worth about $20,000,000 on today's market. Mines were widely scattered, from the Grey Eagle on the East Fork of Sardine Creek, to the Braden Mine on Kanes Creek, to the 900-foot deep Sylvanite on Sams Valley Road. Our mother, as a teenager, lived for a while at the Grey Eagle with Aunt Nora (Wait), who was the cook. She told us of riding the empty ore car on the cable up the mountain to the mine, but she had to walk back down because they wouldn't let her sit up on top of the ore of the loaded car coming down.

to be continued.....

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ARCHEOLOGY

By CINDY FAUBIAN

In June Mrs. Apostel's class from Patrick Elementary School visited our museum grounds. The enthusiastic group of fourth graders enjoyed an afternoon with the Associate Professor of Archeology from Southern Oregon State College, Dr. Ted Goebel.

They were joined by a group of young adults from Hanby Middle School who walked down the hill to work with the other students. Not only were they eager participants in the archeological dig, they were very responsible and polite to everyone they came into contact with.

Dr. Goebel taught the students how to stake out a dig site and the various stages of excavation. The group seemed to enjoy using the shaker screens most, but nothing compared to the excited faces as the students pulled a steady stream of items from the ground. Everything from animal bones to tiny perfume bottles were unearthed.

Dr. Goebel generously donated his knowledge, energy and time for two very hot days and then gave the historical society one of the large shakers for our own use.

All our thanks go out to Dr. Goebel, the students, Mrs. Apostel and G.H.H.S. volunteer, Joyce Wayland, for making the day a huge success.

Dr. Goebel will be doing another archeological dig this fall. Anyone wishing to participate can call the museum for more information.

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ELECTION

Put your thinking caps on. Election of officers will take place in February, 1995 with nominations at the January 18, 1995 meeting. Have some control in the management of your society. If you're interested in one of the offices, or know someone who is or who would do a good job, please attend our next meeting and share the information.

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ANNUAL DUES

Its early for this reminder, but our next newsletter will be just before the Christmas and New Years holidays. That's such a busy time for everyone that I thought a little early nudge wouldn't hurt. Renewal notices will be phoned or mailed in January but by then you're already in arrears since our term of membership runs January 1 thru December 31. Any help with the bookkeeping and membership roster by early payment of dues is greatly appreciated!!

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MEETINGS

Regular monthly meetings are held the third Wednesday of each month at 7:00 P.M. in the museum, located at 504 First Avenue. Please join us for an evening of fellowship, some say-so in how your society is run, and some great refreshments. Next meetings are:

Wednesday, September 21, 7:00 PM
Wednesday, October 19, 7:00 PM
Wednesday, November 16, 7:00 PM
Wednesday, December 21, 7:00 PM

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OFFICERS

President - Marge Martin
855-1559
Vice-President - Clare Moore
855-1891
Secretary - Ted Wharton
773-4525
Treasurer - Lyn Parker
855-9059

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Have a wonderful Halloween and Thanksgiving, and don't forget to cast your vote on Election Day. We'll be visiting with you again in December, hopefully a little earlier in the month. We can never express our sincere thanks often enough to all of our dedicated members and volunteers who help us keep everything going. Just know its a labor of love for all of us and we do appreciate all of you.

Gold Hill Historical Society
P. O. Box 26
504 First Avenue
Gold Hill, Oregon 97525